

# UNIFORMED PROFESSIONAL FIRE FIGHTERS ASSOCIATION OF CONNECTICUT

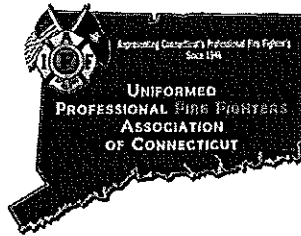
AFFILIATED WITH INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS

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Good afternoon, Honorable Chairmen Rep. Terzcyak and Sen. Winfield, Honorable members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee, my name is Richard Hart. I represent the Uniformed Professional Firefighters Association of Connecticut which represents 43 Local affiliates of the International Association of Firefighters. Membership in the UPFFA is comprised of approximately 4,000 Union firefighters in Connecticut.

I am speaking today in support of S.B. 593(Raised), An Act Concerning Severe Mental and Emotional Impairment and Work's Compensation Coverage. The typical firefighter's career lasts approximately 20-25 years, some longer. In those years, firefighters are exposed to a variety of emergency situations, the most devastating being the death of another human being. Be it responding to a Christmas morning fire in Stamford, where two adults and three little children died, or, to a motor vehicle accident where the victim is a first responder's son, or an accident so horrific, two kids, the same age as my children rear-ended a parked tractor trailer on I 84, the only thing visible were an arm and two legs. The list of incidences could go on. The effects are not obvious on the surface, but are more subtle.

Firefighters are called upon on a daily basis to run at an emergency or disaster when everyone is running away. We do not ask, we do not hesitate, we do not turn away, we react, and we mitigate the situation. Firefighters are called "America's Bravest" for that reason. What happens though, when an incident or culmination of incidents has such an injurious effect on our first responders that they are unable to cope? The United States Military recognizes PTSD and treats it. Whether or not they do enough is for another discussion, but the fact remains, it is a legitimate diagnosis. PTSD is treatable and in most cases, curable. From cognitive therapy, exposure therapy, eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), to medication, there are treatment modalities available-without the stigma of PTSD. According to the IAFF, 15-22% of their members suffer from PTSD. Of their 350,000 members, that is approximately 70,000 members, and of those, 35,000, or 50% turn to substance abuse to cope. Not only are the effects felt by the municipality in lost time, decreased or substandard productivity, and potential disciplinary issues, but they are felt at home. An increase in domestic abuse is possible, as stated earlier, an increase in substance abuse, and in some cases, suicidal behaviors are exhibited.

Because of reforms made to Workers Compensation regulations in 1993, their mental health and post-traumatic stress in the aftermath of such events are no longer recognized as a work related injury, therefore early intervention and treatment is not immediately available as a work related injury. Allowing for sufficient time to receive treatment without the need to rush back to work will only aid in the recovery and return to duty of our personnel. The overarching principle of this legislation should be to ensure the mental wellbeing of our "Bravest" so they are operating at 100%, 100% of the time. Thank you for your time.

Richard Hart



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